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Greece

Poultry and Products

Update on Avian Influenza

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Report Highlights:

With six recent cases of H5N1 and more expected, Greek authorities are taking every precaution to confront Avian Influenza. Despite the government's public information effort and press cooperation, public reaction has affected trade. GoG officials are calling for EU compensation.

Includes PSD Changes: No
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Incidents in Greece

There have been six confirmed cases of H5N1 in migratory birds in Greece. Five cases from the northeastern region and one from the island of Skyros, about 75 miles north east of Athens. Reports of dead or dying birds continue to come in from almost every region in Greece, including the Aegean and Ionian islands. At the same time, the national reference laboratory has announced that it has reached its maximum testing capacity and is now storing dead birds as they developed a backlog of testing specimens. In outlying areas of northern Greece and in Thessaloniki itself, the Ministry of Health has noted a significant increase in people with flu like symptoms that have requested testing for H5N1. All testing for H5N1 in humans in Greece have proven negative thus far.

Government Response

The Greek Ministries of Agriculture, Interior and Rural Development have all reacted to the situation in kind, working with the EU, state, and local authorities to ensure that the appropriate action has been and will be taken in order to effectively confront the growing threat of Avian Influenza in Greece. The overall focus of the GoG at this time is to continue to aggressively pursue early detection and isolation of H5N1 carrier birds and to prevent the virus from passing to domestic bird populations. Strict measures have been enforced to prevent open and un-contained exposure of domestic fowl and the GoG can levy fines of up to 3,000 euros for a single violation. Specific initiatives such as mass feeding along shorelines and wetland areas to keep migratory flocks from areas with higher population density, and engaging local school systems in a grassroots education and warning campaign, are being utilized in the effected regions of northern Greece. Despite the comprehensive response of the GoG, specific instances of non-compliance exist. In western Macedonia, near the migratory bird dense area of the Prespes wetlands, rural villages have continued to keep their poultry out and in the open. However, the fines levied against individuals who violate the open-air domestic poultry ban may prove to be an ineffective deterrent, as many rural Greeks cannot afford to pay fines that are levied against them.

The Ministry of Agriculture's strategy to utilize hunters, farmers, fisherman and citizens to be on the lookout for dead or dying migratory appears to have been effective in the early detection of Avian Influenza in northern Greece. A protective radius will be in place around the sites where the first three birds were found for 21 days; this area will be essentially isolated from free movement and monitored. A larger protective zone will be around the sites for an additional 9 days and will be closely monitored. All domestic birds from within the protected area will be banned from export outside the area and the Ministry of Agriculture will continue to enforce its ban on open-air poultry markets and farms. At this time, no mass culling of domestic birds has been ordered.

Public Reaction

The efforts of the GoG to inform the public on Avian Influenza have been received with mixed reaction among the public, with Greeks in the rural areas reacting more viscerally than those in the major urban centers. The media has been remarkably cooperative in helping the government to inform the public on sanitation and personal protection measures and Minister of Health Nikitas Kaklamanis recently thanked the media for its (uncharacteristically) calm and responsible tone.

The upcoming spring season is likely to bring a significant increase in migratory bird traffic in Southeastern Europe as a whole. The recent confirmation of H5N1 in Southern Italy is indicative of this reality. The number of H5N1 cases in migratory birds is expected to

increase in the coming weeks and we will continue to monitor the efforts of the GoG to isolate the domestic poultry industry from all possible contact with migratory birds.

The Greek Poultry Industry and Trade Impact

Greece produces approximately 180,000 MT of poultry meat per annum, meeting about 80% of the domestic demand before Avian Influenza. According to the GoG Ministry of Agriculture reports, the value of Greek live poultry and meat production is estimated between 550 to 600 million Euros in 2005. The remaining 20% of Greece's poultry meat needs are met through imports, primarily from the EU and Brazil, with total imports of up to 35,000 MT/annum. Over a million parent-stock chicks are imported each year for meat production and another 200,000 chicks are imported for egg production. These imports come primarily from other EU member states and the U.S. Exports are limited to only 6,000 – 7,000 MT/annum, mostly to Albania.

Domestic consumption in October, after the outbreaks of avian flu in Turkey and Romania, dropped by almost 55 percent. Reports have continued to note large declines in sales of poultry in Greece, possibly as high as 70%. Poultry feedlots are unable to keep chickens for more than 16 weeks in feeding. After slaughter they must channel to deep-freeze. Reportedly there are now approximately 30,000 – 40,000 MT in deep-freeze facilities. A second generation of impacts has been reported in the consumption and sales by domestic feed and grain, following decisions by feedlots to reduce chick production and feeding. To date, the total economic damage officially reported by both the GoG and the domestic poultry industry is estimated at over 50 million Euros.

GoG officials have joined with officials from Italy, France and Spain in calling on the EU to relax rules to allow governments to support farmers for loss of trade if poultry prices plummet. The EU is resisting this, but it allows for national governments to put into place their own domestic compensation plans as long as those plans meet EU state aid rules. The EU does have compensation plans to replace birds that are culled if the disease moves to Europe's commercial poultry population.